REMOTE HUMANITARIAN MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAMMING
Guidance Note
MAY 2020
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover and inside photo: Kites against a vivid blue sky / Fabio Bernardi / Shutterstock.com

About this Guidance Note Series

The Work in the Age of COVID-19 Guidance Note series falls under the Partnerships and Practice Stream of Humanitarian Horizons research program. Intended as short and practical documents for operational actors, the series includes humanitarian guidance notes on remote management, remote monitoring, remote facilitation and remote working.

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) and CARE collaborated on this guidance note as part of HAG’s Humanitarian Horizons research program.

About Humanitarian Advisory Group

Humanitarian Advisory Group was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative. The program adds unique value to humanitarian action in Asian and Pacific contexts by generating evidence and creating conversation for change. This publication was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

About CARE

CARE International is a global confederation working together to end poverty. With 75 years of poverty-fighting and humanitarian experience, CARE tackles the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice in order to deliver lasting change in the lives of poor and vulnerable people. We believe that at its root, poverty is caused by unequal power relations that result in inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities between women and men, between power-holders and marginalised communities and between countries. Poverty cannot be overcome without addressing these underlying power imbalances. Women and girls are the key to overcoming poverty and CARE invests in them as the greatest sources of untapped human potential in the world.

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REMOTE MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAMMING DURING COVID-19

Overview

Many organisations are establishing or scaling up remote humanitarian management and programming practices in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Access constraints, infection risks and travel restrictions are requiring both international and national humanitarian actors to think about adapting existing programming models. Access is significantly reduced for international agencies due to staff evacuations and border closures, and many are shifting towards remote management with partners at the national and local levels. National actors are also increasingly adopting remote programming models, including involving communities in managing program activities.

Supporting locally led response and remote management

In recent years there has been considerable research around the challenges and opportunities offered by remote management and programming. The COVID-19 context amplifies these challenges, whilst offering new ways for humanitarian actors to mitigate risks and continue to meet ongoing humanitarian needs. There is an opportunity to support localisation commitments through enabling increased decision-making and program management by national organisations, staff and communities.

Why this note?

Ensuring the safety and protection of all staff, partners and program participants, whilst providing life-saving assistance in transitioning to remote management and programming models, is vital. This note is intended to guide international and national operational actors on how to adapt and think about remote management in the context of COVID-19. It provides a snapshot of key takeaways from previous research, and draws together emerging learning and guidance. Humanitarian Advisory Group and CARE have collaborated on this guidance note. It is part of a guidance series on remote working produced as part of our Humanitarian Horizons research program.

Summary of practical actions

Working with partners: Co-design – with local and national partners – remotely managed projects that draw on their knowledge and relationships and promote ownership.

Context specific capacities: Identify the remote management capacities that all partners (both international and national) need to maintain program quality and respond to COVID-19 risks and impacts.

Safety and wellbeing: Ensure remote management approaches support the safety and wellbeing of partner or national office staff and program participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Flexible and adaptable approaches: Establish flexible remote management approaches that can be adapted to contextual changes easily and rapidly. Tailor organisations’ systems and processes to meet remote management needs during COVID-19 and ongoing programming.

Accountability and protection: Ensure that remote management approaches support accountability to affected populations (AAP), transparency and due diligence requirements, and address protection needs.
REMOTE MANAGEMENT IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

Remote management involves increased devolution of responsibility and decision-making to national staff, national partners and organisations, or communities themselves, with some management functions undertaken by head offices. This can include remote programming practices operating between national offices or organisations and partners at the community level, or between international agencies and their national partners.3

What does remote management look like in the COVID-19 context?

Remote management practices differ according to agency and country context, as shown in the infographic below. During the COVID-19 pandemic, various remote management and programming practices and models are being adopted with local and national partners or national offices, and more program functions are being undertaken by communities themselves.4

Spectrum of remote management modalities5

- Remote Control: Majority of decisions made by international managers located apart from programs. Limited delegation of authority.
- Remote Delegation: Partial or temporary delegation of authority to national/local staff at project sites while other staff are in a separate location.
- Remote Support: A strategy to transfer decision making and authority gradually to national/local actors, while financial and strategic oversight is retained remotely.
- Remote Partnership: Local actors maintain significant decision-making authority.

Access constraints: before and during COVID-196

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to COVID-19</th>
<th>Key access issues during COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 countries had <strong>extreme</strong> humanitarian access constraints</td>
<td><strong>63</strong> countries are covered by the Global COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, many of which have humanitarian access constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 had <strong>very high</strong> constraints</td>
<td><strong>COVID-19 compounds pre-existing access constraints</strong> in many countries (e.g. Yemen and Syria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 had <strong>high</strong> constraints6</td>
<td><strong>COVID-19 is creating new constraints</strong> on access to an increasing number of people due to lockdowns, travel restrictions and risk mitigation measures (e.g. Bangladesh)</td>
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</table>
1. Working with partners

Key action: Co-design – with local and national partners – remotely managed projects that draw on their knowledge and relationships and promote ownership.

Working with partners or offices in country and drawing on local knowledge and relationships in planning for remote management practices during the COVID-19 pandemic will be critical. Equitable and ethical partnerships support locally led responses, as research on responses which involved remote management and programming has shown.7

Practical steps

- Co-design projects that will be remotely managed with partners, building on national and local partner and community knowledge and relationships, particularly in relation to COVID-19 risks and impacts.
- Discuss which program management areas national and local partners will manage, and which require additional remote support.
- Discuss how remote management can support localisation commitments such as a higher proportion of decision-making by national and local partners, and increased funding and transparency of budgets. Consider how partners can measure progress in this area using tools such as the Localisation Measurement Framework.8

Inspiration and ideas

Remote management supporting localisation

In 2018, CARE remotely supported the response to Tropical Cyclone Gita in Tonga, led by their national partner MORDI. CARE provided targeted funding and technical, planning and reporting support to MORDI. Decisions around the remote management process were made jointly, with CARE leading on some functions remotely. The evaluation of the partnership’s response found that it supported significant national actor engagement and leadership by providing substantial funding and capacity support to MORDI as a national NGO.9
2. Context-specific capacities

Key action: Identify the remote management capacities all partners (both international and national) need to maintain program quality and respond to COVID-19 risks and impacts.

Effective remote management requires clarity around the strengths and capacities of all partners (international and national). Research highlights that approaches that integrate capacity-strengthening activities are more effective.\textsuperscript{10} Research on localisation also highlights that national and local actors must be able to define their own capacity objectives and needs.\textsuperscript{11}

Practical steps

- ✔ Assess/revisit partners’ key capacities and strengths and how these can be used to continue effective programs through remote management during COVID-19.
- ✔ Plan the provision of remote capacity strengthening to national partners and organisations (e.g. via virtual technical support, distance and online mentoring, and online meetings and workshops).

Inspiration and ideas

**Remote capacity support in the Pacific**

Churches across the Pacific are being remotely supported by the Church Agency Network for Disaster Operations (CAN DO), based in Australia and New Zealand, to lead a GIS mapping project of church-owned evacuation centres and disaster response capacities. Church representatives are being supported with training and technical support to lead on the project, with CAN DO agencies providing remote support.\textsuperscript{12}

**The Remote Partnering Project**

The Partnership Brokers Association established the Remote Partnering Project in 2017. It offers a Certificate in Brokering Partnerships Remotely, a Tool Box and Remote Partnering Work Book to strengthen both national and international actors’ capacities in remote partnering.\textsuperscript{13}
3. Safety and wellbeing

Key action: Ensure remote management approaches support the safety and wellbeing of partner or national office staff and program participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Minimising risk and ensuring safety and wellbeing is a key consideration in remote management. Understanding and mitigating COVID-19 risks is fundamental to continuation of programming. Research shows that humanitarian leadership teams that are diverse and inclusive are nearly five times more likely to be perceived to manage risk well.14

Practical steps

- Avoid risk transfer as a policy priority. International agencies should consider how to avoid transferring risk when working with national staff and partners in the COVID-19 context.
- Conduct joint risk mapping. Plan together to ensure that all parties understand all risks and mitigation steps are in place. This enables national partners to make informed decisions about adapting their activities and operations.
- Make arrangements to reduce the risk of virus transmission (e.g. increased communications support, budget for personal protective equipment or remote data collection) so that partner staff can conduct their work safely.
- Discuss streamlining partner activities to minimise unnecessary exposure to the virus.
- Plan to detect and mitigate COVID-19 risks for staff and programs, including establishing risk thresholds and referral pathways for partner staff and program participants.
- Consider – and if needed, take steps to improve – the diversity and inclusiveness of leadership teams (partners, communities and international staff) for remotely managed projects.
- Explore how partners could work with other implementing organisations to reduce unnecessary staff travel and COVID-19 risks.

Inspiration and ideas

Risk management in the 2014 Ebola response

Like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ebola outbreak challenged traditional approaches to risk management for aid agencies. Countries in which agencies had been operating for years imposed new safety and security rules for aid workers and tightened constraints on access. In responding to Ebola, non-medical humanitarian agencies were required to adapt risk management approaches quickly, in particular taking a whole-of-organisation approach to identifying and managing multiple risks rather than dealing with individual program and health risks.15
4. Flexible and adaptable approaches

Key actions: Establish flexible remote management approaches that can be adapted to contextual changes easily and rapidly. Tailor organisations’ systems and processes to meet remote management needs during COVID-19 and ongoing programming.

Flexible programming approaches that meet pre-existing humanitarian needs and cope with COVID-19 impacts are necessary. Actors can adapt standard organisational systems and processes in finance, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), reporting, training and human resourcing with partners and national offices to support remote management. They can also support national and local partners to create their own contextualised systems and processes.

Practical steps

☑ Discuss a range of potential scenarios with partners that factor in context changes due to COVID-19.
☑ Develop flexible program plans and agreements that can be adapted if the context changes.
☑ Consider how standard operating procedures can be implemented to quickly and flexibly respond to contextual changes.
☑ Ensure contingency funds can be rapidly deployed to address COVID-19 impacts, and that partners have support for financial management.
☑ Develop context-specific communications protocols, reporting systems and M&E procedures (e.g. only collecting necessary information under constrained circumstances, or conducting needs assessments in tandem with safety and security assessments).
☑ Ensure monitoring and reporting processes systematically collect information about relevant COVID-19 contextual changes, and that there is a process established to feed this information into decision-making.
☑ Invest in strengthening partner communication infrastructure or systems, such as a video conferencing system, or simply increase the communications budget.

Inspiration and ideas

Adapting needs assessments

In 2014, CARE responded to the Ebola crisis and learned the importance of adapting key processes such as needs assessments to suit the context. Fast forward to 2020, and CARE teams are initiating COVID-19 responses after discussion and agreement with project teams about what can be adapted to make programming easier. For example, the teams have adapted reporting templates and changed the data that needs to be collected in the current circumstances.16
5. Accountability and protection

Key action: Ensure that remote management approaches support accountability to affected populations (AAP), transparency and due diligence requirements, and address protection needs.

Practical steps

- Support partners and national offices to set up or amend accountability mechanisms to ensure information about COVID-19 is communicated, program participants can address COVID-19-specific concerns in feedback mechanisms, and systems are in place to incorporate feedback into program management.
- Provide remote technical support based on partner-identified needs for ensuring AAP.
- Agree on how remote management approaches will meet donor due diligence and transparency requirements.
- Invest in existing local and national partners to scale up their protection and AAP programming.

Inspiration and ideas

Beyond face-to-face engagement

CARE is currently working with partners to seek ways to interact directly with communities and individuals other than face-to-face engagement. This includes SMS, WhatsApp and other digital channels for remote information gathering and feedback. Privacy and ethical considerations are paramount.17
USING THIS GUIDANCE NOTE

An increase in remote management and programming during COVID-19 is likely to significantly shift the way humanitarian sector works now and in the future. Collaborating with national and local actors and communities on effective remote management approaches is vital, as is sharing successful approaches and common challenges.

This guidance note can be used to:

- plan remote management approaches
- raise awareness of remote management best practices
- advocate with donors for supporting remote management requirements

USEFUL RESOURCES


GOARN, IFRC, UNICEF and WHO, Tips for engaging communities during COVID-19 in low-resource settings, remotely and in-person, April 2020

Sphere, The Sphere standards and the Coronavirus response, February 2020.


Norman, B., Monitoring and accountability practices for remotely managed projects implemented in volatile operating environments: A research study detailing the key issues and responding good practices, HIF and Tearfund, February 2012.

ENDNOTES

1. As outlined in the useful resources section.


3. This definition was adapted from: Women's Refugee Commission, Guidance on establishing remote monitoring and management of GBV programming in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020.


11. PIANGO and Humanitarian Advisory Group, Tracking progress on localisation: a Pacific perspective, 2018


